

# ARTFORUM

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HOT LIST TIMOTHY DRUCKREY ON CURATING THE WEB

## WORK AND DISPLAY

Contributing to the general miasma of pseudocriticisms of art on the Web, Michael Kimmelman wrote recently in *The New York Times*: "Mostly bad artists exploit the medium to get attention they otherwise couldn't: after all, the Internet is a way for them to circumvent the commercial system that has been in place in the art world for at least 100 years and that has acted (imperfectly) as the judge of what's worth seeing." But, as Kimmelman knows, after decades of experimental installation, sound, and video media, the linking of communication and aesthetics has never fit quite comfortably into the categories of art criticism, art history, or typical curatorship. Many of the issues around electronic media don't simply "circumvent" market arbitration; they threaten the very apparatus sustaining that "imperfect" system. Since Web art goes against traditional notions of curatorship as caretaking and pedagogy, the immediate question is how to display a network outside the archaic system of exhibition. Even a cursory look at some of the efforts at showing "Web art" poses problems. To believe that the Web reorients the question about the "dematerialization of the artwork"—a claim made emphatically in "PORT: Navigating Digital Culture," a vaunted virtual exhibition organized by Artnetweb at MIT's List Center ([www.artnetweb.com/port](http://www.artnetweb.com/port))—is to imagine a bond between creativity and "new media." At its best, the Net represents itself not as a utopian sphere of dissatisfaction-as-liberation, but as conditional, a terrain of shifting ideas loosening art's hold on the concepts of both timelessness and instantaneity both by abandoning the

physical space of the institution as the site of experience and by finding work that goes beyond replicating or adapting art designed for other venues. In the context of the endless résumés-cum-projects that haunt the Net, examples of such sites are few and far between, but here are some of the most notable.

**JOHN F. SIMON, JR.'S EVERY ICON** ([www.stadiumweb.com](http://www.stadiumweb.com)). Simon's site represents an elegant challenge to notions of the image, instant gratification, and Web-based distribution. The strategy—to serve at once as a resource and gallery—is tentative enough to avoid the pitfalls of institutional thinking and flexible enough to understand the oscillation between the typical artifacts of curatorial display and their implementation as electronic form. Every icon is a small applet (an autonomous subprogram that can be downloaded and operate within a browser like Netscape) that quietly generates every possible image in the confines of the grid of a typical computer icon (the tiny images that represent applications and documents). The process of image generation begins as the applet loads and restarts every time. (In a personalized edition, for sale through Stadium, the process begins at the date of sale and update and runs continuously.) The course is not for the impatient: it takes several hundred trillion, trillion, years (more precisely,  $1.8 \times 10^{308}$ ) to display every single possible combination.